

Identifying Emerging Issues

Lee Beers¹, Emily Adams², Mary Griffith³, Peggy Hall⁴, Dianne Shoemaker⁵, Chris Zoller⁶

¹OSU Extension Trumbull County, 520 W Main St, Cortland, OH; ²OSU Extension Coshocton County, 724 S 7th St, Coshocton, OH; ³OSU Extension Madison County, 217 Elm St, London, OH; ⁴OSU Extension Union County 18000 State Route 4, Suite E, Marysville, OH; ⁵OSU Extension Mahoning County, 490 South Broad St, Canfield, OH; ⁶OSU Extension Tuscarawas County, 419 16th St SW New Philadelphia, OH

ABSTRACT

Emerging issues have a way of sneaking up on Extension professionals resulting in a reactionary approach to educating ourselves about an issue, developing curriculum, and informing clientele. In 2016, a team of Extension professionals with varying skillsets developed the OSU Extension Critical Issues Team in an effort to proactively address emerging issues. Issues can be highly controversial (GMOs), highly technical (biotech), government directed (Veterinary Feed Directive), or any topic that has the potential to elicit questions from a broad range of clientele. Identifying emerging issues in a timely manner is very important for the success of the team. Regular online seminars, survey of advisory groups, and survey of Educators from all program areas are used to identify and prioritize issues. Once an issue is identified, the team recruit professionals within the University that have expertise on the issue to develop curriculum, produce factsheets, and educate fellow county Educators to handle questions that may arise. Here we present our team successes, obstacles we encountered (and how we got over them), and lessons learned during our first year as we addressed the issue of GMOs in agriculture and the food system. Our model to address critical issues is highly adaptable to local and national issues, and is a system that could be easily mirrored by fellow Extension systems to provide proactive outreach on emerging issues.

INTRODUCTION

Critical issues are not limited to controversial issues. They also include issues and situations that arise quickly and Extension personnel must address in a very timely manner. In 2016, OSU Extension devoted funding towards a team to develop resources to better equip educators with knowledge and skills in communicating with clientele about critical issues.



"Innovate Extension" was the catalyst to develop the Critical Issues Team.



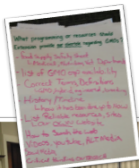
PROGRAMMING

Extension professionals in all four program areas encounter questions and concerns from both clientele and funders about emerging issues which may be complex or controversial. The objective of the critical issues team is to equip educators with the tools they need to address these issues. The team has implemented the following programs to support educator training:

- Panel discussion on GMOs at retreat for Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Professionals in 2016
- Facilitated discussion with educators to identify information needs related to GMOs
- Invited speaker to discuss effective communication techniques to convey information about hot topics to clientele
- Lunch and learn webinars for educators to provide peer-to-peer education on emerging issues
- Journal club to discuss research on emerging issues



Farmers and Ag professionals were invited to a panel discussion on GMOs.



Team members led Small group discussions to determine needs of educators to better serve clientele with questions and concerns about emerging issues.



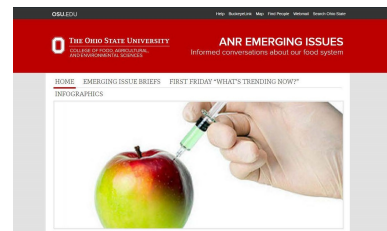
FUTURE GOALS

OSU Extension historically has focused its resources and attention to educating the public on important or controversial public issues, but our response to such issues can be reactionary, poorly planned and burdened by inconsistent messaging and outputs. To address this problem, our project team will develop a "Critical Issues Protocol" for OSU Extension. The goal of the protocol is to establish a systematic institutional approach for identifying, reporting and addressing critical issues at the state, county and even community level. A Critical Issues Protocol ("protocol") will result in timely discovery of emerging critical issues, a collaborative approach to internal comprehension of an issue and streamlined, consistent information delivery on an identified critical issue.



TIPS FOR STARTING AN EMERGING ISSUES TEAM:

- Administrative support/buy-in
- Start small with one program area as a pilot
- Engage experts in subject area
- Set realistic goals
- Engage varying viewpoints



The Critical Issues Team developed a website for Extension educators to serve as a resource of information to develop confidence in knowing more about emerging issues.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

u.osu.edu/emergingissues